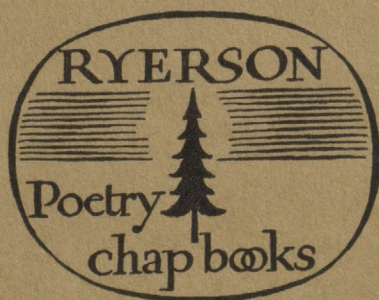
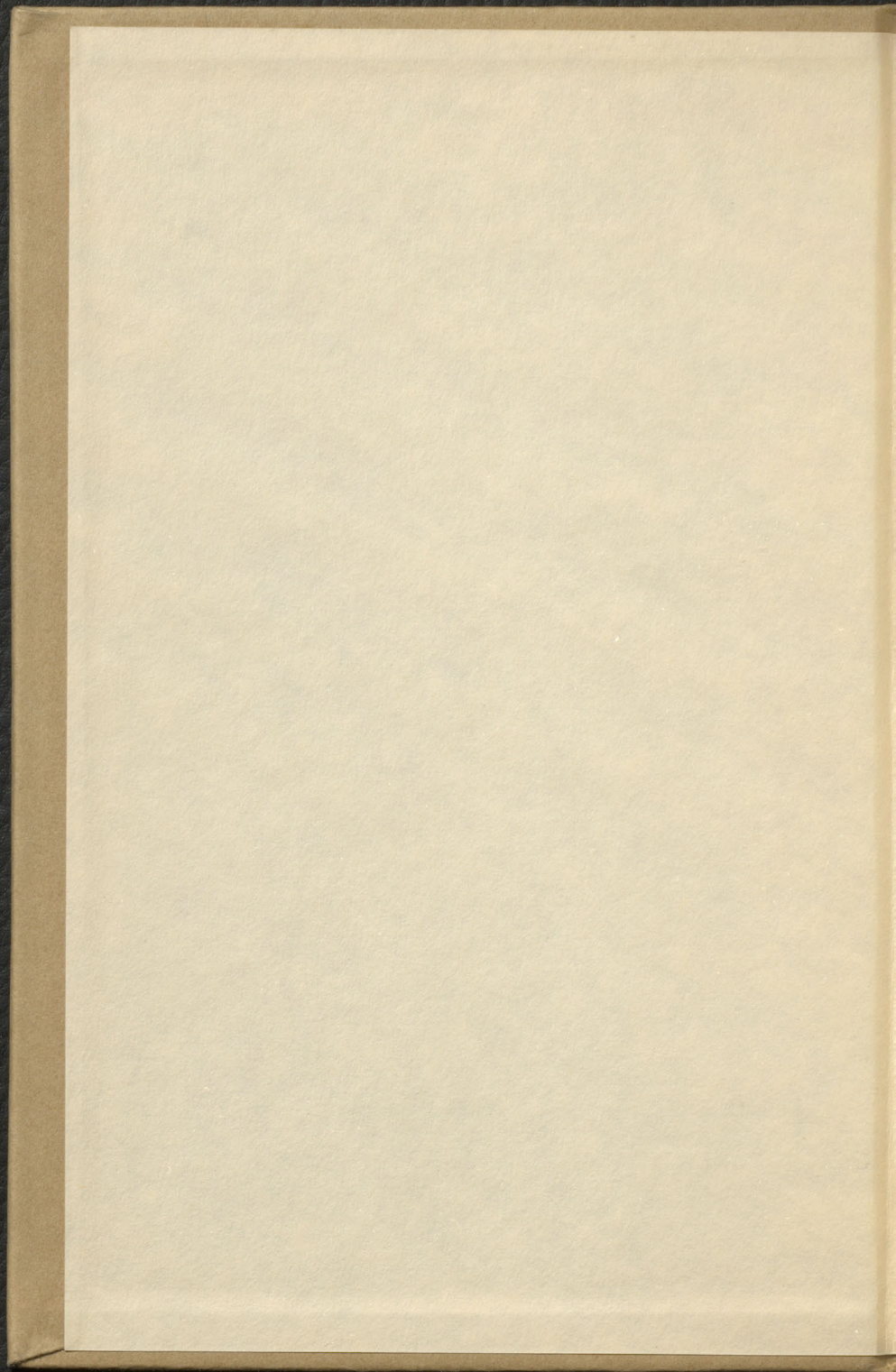


# In The Egyptian Gallery

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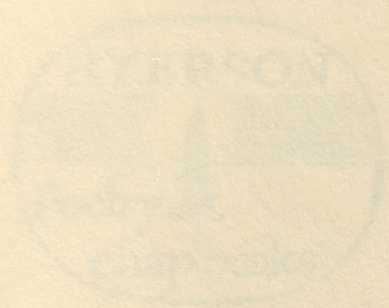
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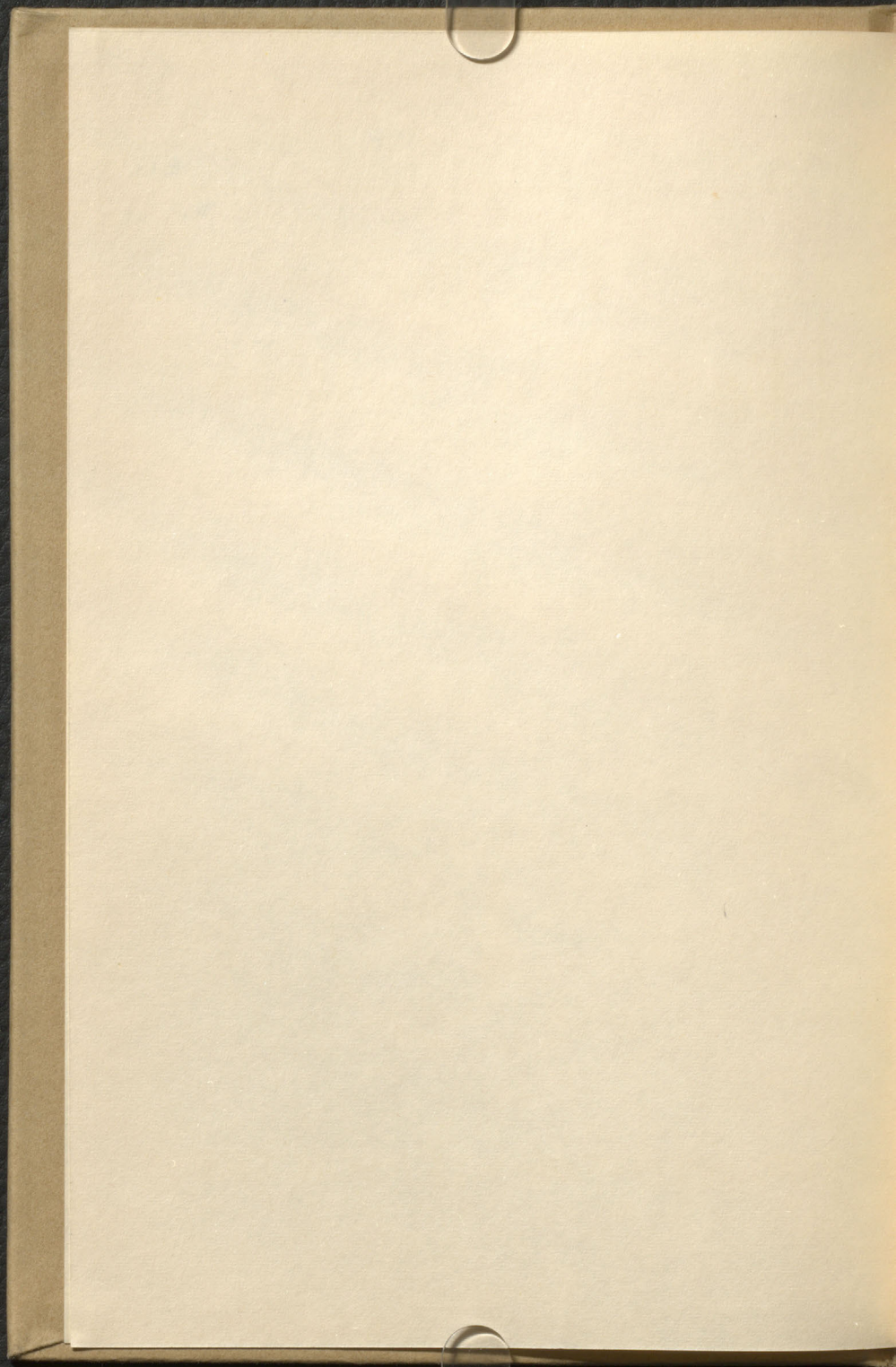
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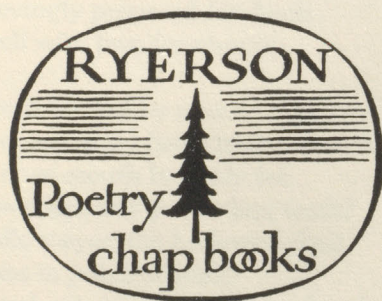
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# In The Egyptian Gallery

FRED SWAYZE



TORONTO • *The* RYERSON PRESS

*This is Chap-Book 196*

**O**F THIS EDITION OF *IN THE EGYPTIAN GALLERY*,  
BY FRED SWAYZE, TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY COPIES  
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# In The Egyptian Gallery

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## IN THE EGYPTIAN GALLERY

*(The Royal Ontario Museum)*

I WHO once was An-tjau  
Travestied lie here exposed  
In this cunningly conditioned tomb  
Perpetuating Egypt's drought  
Lest mould and rust should bring to naught  
The embalmer's art, the curator's skill.

The Ka that dwelt with me in the gloom  
Of the rock-cut tomb fled long ago.  
I am now a curiosity  
Who lovingly prepared for death  
To dwell with love for eternity.

May truth be told by necromancy  
When none would listen to the unvoiced breath  
At the open mouth but only see  
Hardened lips and protruding teeth?  
The hollow eyes, the hollowed skull,  
The arms in pubic attitude  
Ridging the stained brown linen bands  
Are attributes of mortality.  
Men gaze uncomprehendingly  
At the resurrection of the body.

Neither Isis nor Osiris  
Can here protect their ancient dead  
Against the curious riddled with the virus  
Of unbelief. Not heaven, not hell,  
Not death itself has any reality  
For these whose immortality  
Has been forfeited for daily bread.

What heaven could ever be devised  
To keep them fed, amused, surprised!  
What rational hell could be invented  
To teach a lesson to the self-demented!  
What death could gladden or horrify  
These who believe they will not die!

#### *NO OTHER GODS*

BEARDED and black, the rabbis  
Enclosed in holy talk  
Stride sightlessly through the market  
On their way to the synagogue  
To worship a desert god.

We surfeited shoppers who worship  
Many gods, having come  
To terms with Babylon,  
Embrace our paper bags  
Like fertility goddesses  
Hugging mammoth breasts  
And stare after the rabbis  
As though, unfairly, someone  
Had mentioned God or death  
Or hunger, pain or grief  
In a shocked silence.



## REMEMBER NOW

"THAT we may remember them as we knew them,"  
The mortician murmurs, *sotto voce*,  
Deftly disguising death with cosmetics,  
Flowers, soft lights and solicitude.

But not this! not Derry! This boy lying dead,  
His calm, clear face a mask of sleep.  
I have never learned to accept the death  
Of a boy, not in all my years as a teacher.

I remember only the liveliness,  
The eager hand upthrust, the frown  
Of concentration, the smile that signalled  
Comprehension, the flaring burst  
Of temper and the gall of discipline,  
The helmeted rugby hero limping  
Back to the bench, the nervous tic  
Along the jaw as intently he watched  
The sweep of hockey—from the penalty box,  
His gleaming shoulders and flushed face  
When time was called in basketball,  
The dance, the debate, the thousand things  
That were Derry. But not this sleeping stranger!

I have learned to accept mortality  
In the dead, soft-wrinkled faces of old men,  
Shaven and scrubbed, powdered and rouged,  
Tricked out and sent forth to meet their Maker.  
"That we may remember them as we knew them."

I shall remember Derry. He lives  
In the shadowy halls of memory.  
The summer lightning of his smile  
Will bring the boy to mind, or his name  
Will summon him, not like Samuel  
Old and tired, "Why trouble ye me?",  
Nor Lazarus-like, with the taint of the tomb.

A teacher's memory, like his day,  
Is thronged with youngsters, and he may  
At times forget whether he moves  
Among the living or the dead.

### *PROSPECTUS*

THERE is a time to live and a time to die.  
The mining magnate died on the holiday,  
Markets closed and margin gone, to lie  
Immaculate, chilled and plumped, until Tuesday.

An indefatigable dropper of names,  
He knew well how the other—and richer—half lives.  
The right people came from Bay Street and St. James,  
Or at least sent flowers and representatives.

Gushing pure unction, the right kind of clergyman  
Mentioned his name favourably for Grace  
And, compromising God, commissioned him  
To one of the higher echelons of Space.

Encased in rosewood and bronze, he denied the earth  
The ninety-nine cents of minerals he was worth.



## *FAMILY PLOT*

HIGH above the cemetery pond  
In a druid circle the ceremonial cedars  
Stand around our monolithic marble,  
Sombre monuments to family pride.

Father, deep among the twining roots,  
Feet to the centre, is still proudly aloof  
From the humble men he hired and underpaid  
Who lie beyond the cedars in the open sun.

Mother, as small and gray and unobtrusive  
As her marker, still protects her youngest son,  
Poor silly Billy, assaulter of servant girls,  
Put away at last by the firm hand of death.

Bessie now lies closer to her husband  
Than in life, snugged down for eternity  
Beside Bob, the eldest, who drank his inheritance neat—  
From shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in two generations.

Charlie, the prodigal, is home for good,  
And Addie, the Continuing Presbyterian,  
United now with the vast majority.  
And there, by Father, is room enough for me.

Down by the still waters, red-winged blackbirds  
Sway on the reeds; pheasants thread the rushes,  
And vireos call incessantly from the elms.  
Field mice tunnel the weeds; rabbits spring  
Violently to escape the hunting hound,  
While bedded on moss frogs blink solemnly.

I have an elderly desire to be cremated  
And scattered anonymously beside the pond.

## OLD MISTER GARRITY

OLD Mister Garrity died this spring.

The street's best gardener left us  
When the mid-March sun was gratefully warm.  
As yet his lawn was sodden brown;  
His cedars were boxed; spireas staked  
And bound like martyrs to searing snow;  
His roses still were buried deep,  
Safe from frost; and his hotbed, banked  
And heating, stared blindly back at the sun.

From the elm that shelters St. Mary's tower  
A robin sang all during Mass.  
Prayers said, his neighbours rose  
Stiffly and followed the priest to the door.  
The undertaker's young men, lounging  
In the mourners' car from the quickening chill,  
Stubbed their cigarettes and advanced  
Ceremoniously to the church's steps,

Like morning-coated diplomats of death  
Smoothly assuming a preternatural calm.



## FROG-CATCHER

WITH cunning sufficient to make the kill  
the little boy stalks a frog  
moving cautiously  
with an acquired skill  
through the sibilant reeds  
putting each foot down into the moss  
and mud and weeds  
as deliberately  
and silently  
as had the great blue heron  
that, frozen into immobility,  
watches him unawares  
with cold unblinking eye.

His outstretched hand talon-tense  
poised  
with bright unblinking eyes the boy  
hovers  
pounces.

With splash and shout of satisfaction  
exultant and triumphant  
he holds up the clutched and captive frog  
its legs stark against his wrist  
like Jove grasping galvanic thunderbolts.

In cold contempt  
the heron lifts itself  
awkwardly beating up  
until it assumes again  
its gracefulness in smooth rhythmic sweep  
legs trailing  
and neck doubled back  
and its head like that of a striking snake.

### ANGELS SOMETIMES FORGET

ANGELS sometimes forget whether they move  
Among the living or the dead. For we  
Who attempt to parcel out eternity  
Into life and death, the Psalmist's span will prove  
To be but the hour before the dawn. The dead  
Are always with us. Just back of conscious thought  
They stand smiling. Like the angels, we are caught  
Turning to speak, lost unawares in love.

### WINTER SOLSTICE

THE ritual sun stood still  
In his appointed place  
Aligned with altar and marking stone,  
Blood-red on the monolith,  
Blood-red on the new snow,  
Blood-red on the knife  
Poised above a boy's arched ribs.

The Christmas star stood still  
In his appointed place  
Aligned with town and ancient trail,  
Blood-red on the threshold,  
Blood-red on the helmet,  
Blood-red on the sword.  
Spring was ever bought with blood.



## THE MIRACLE IS

Put together in the proper way, we all turn out to be a rather weak, watery solution of salts and carbon compounds, more or less jellified. The miracle is that such stuff as we are made of should walk and talk and know such things as song and sadness.

N. J. BERRILL, in *You and The Universe*

THIS is carbon speaking  
intricately compounded  
and immersed in watery salts.

Jellyfellow  
of all who live and die  
daily, compact of faults,  
tried and found wanting,

I have known sadness  
smarting tears and despair  
black and diamond hard  
and thought my life ill-starred.

Grateful for song  
loving laughter and gladness,  
content that the miracle  
should be rounded with a sleep.

## COUNT DOWN

- FIVE     Here we are  
          Alive,  
          Fat kine waiting for the lean  
          Of half a hungry world  
          To come and lick us clean.
- FOUR     On our knees  
          For—?  
          Forty million refugees  
          To learn the Golden Rule  
          And love their enemies?
- THREE    To be or not?  
          Me?  
          A fiery rot in my chromosomes  
          And radioactive bones?
- TWO      You and me  
          Too?  
          O space is time and time  
          Will be the death of me.
- ONE      Is One and all  
          Alone  
          Again and evermore  
          Shall be so.



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*Lorne Pierce—Editor*

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